

Source Evaluation

This guide identifies five kinds of source evaluation questions:

1. - Comprehension.
2. - Comprehension in context.
3. - Usefulness of sources.
4. - Source comparison.
5. - Interpretation.

Each of these will be covered in turn but there will also be key points of general advice appearing in these notes which will be in capital letters. The most important piece of general advice is:

ALWAYS READ THE QUESTION CAREFULLY AND MAKE SURE THAT YOUR ANSWER IS ANSWERING THE QUESTION SET.

1. Comprehension.

- These are usually the early questions. They are meant to be easy. They carry the lowest marks.
- You have to answer what the source shows about a situation.
- The source could be of any number of types.
- Write down everything you can find.
- Keep your mind on the question.
- Look beyond the obvious to what you can **infer** from the source.

INFER = TO WORK SOMETHING OUT FROM WHAT YOU HAVE READ OR SEEN.

*****SQUEEZE THE EVIDENCE FOR MEANING.*****

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A COMPLETELY BIASED OR USELESS SOURCE. YOU CAN FIND OUT A LOT OF INTERESTING THINGS FROM A BIASED SOURCE.

2. Source comprehension in context.

- This means understanding what a source tells us about a topic and linking it with knowledge you already have which is also relevant to the question.
- Use this source and your own knowledge to explain

KEEP THE QUESTION IN MIND WHEN YOU ARE EVALUATING THE SOURCE AND ANSWERING THE QUESTION.

PROPAGANDA = INFORMATION WHICH GIVES A ONE VIEW OF EVENTS EITHER BY CAREFUL SELECTION, EXAGGERATION OR DELIBERATE UNTRUTHS WHICH IS DESIGNED TO GENERATE SUPPORT FOR ONE SIDE IN A CONFLICT, OR QUARREL OR COMPETITION.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A COMPLETELY RELIABLE SOURCE.

3. Usefulness of sources.

SOME SOURCES MIGHT BE MORE USEFUL THAN OTHERS, BUT SOURCES ARE NOT SIMPLY USEFUL OR NOT USEFUL IN THEIR OWN RIGHT, THEY ARE USEFUL OR NOT USEFUL DEPENDING ON WHAT YOU WISH TO FIND OUT FROM THEM, THAT IS DEPENDING ON THE QUESTION BEING ASKED OF THEM.

When judging the usefulness of a source ask questions like:

- where does the source come from?
- who created it?
- why was it created?
- is it reliable in what it says about
- even if it is biased what does it still reveal that is relevant to the question?

Start of with what it can be used for - then discuss the problems of using the source.

3. Usefulness of sources (Continued)

RELIABLE = CAN BE TRUSTED OR MADE USE OF AT FACE VALUE.

REMEMBER - JUST BECAUSE A SOURCE IS UNRELIABLE, THIS DOES NOT MAKE IT TOTALLY USELESS.

If you want to discuss the bias of a source then what reveals its bias?

- its content?
- its attribution? (provenance)
- your knowledge of the period?

ATTRIBUTION / PROVENANCE = THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH A SOURCE WAS PRODUCED

REMEMBER - INACCURATE OR UNRELIABLE SOURCES DO NOT MEAN USELESS SOURCES

REMEMBER - USEFULNESS CAN ONLY BE JUDGED WITH REFERENCE TO THE QUESTION BEING ASKED.

4. Source Comparison.

This kind of question requires all the same skills, comprehension, inference, reliability, usefulness, limits to usefulness, but comparing one source with others. Your answer must be a comparison.

COMPARE = LOOK FOR SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN WHAT DIFFERENT SOURCES OFFER TO ANSWER A QUESTION.

MAKE SURE YOU ARE ANSWERING THE QUESTION - MAKE SURE YOU ACHIEVE A PROPERLY BALANCED ANSWER.

5. Interpretation.

This requires you to assess how valid judgements about the past are.

**INTERPRETATION = AN ATTEMPT TO DESCRIBE / EXPLAIN /
MAKE A JUDGEMENT ABOUT THE PAST.**

These are the higher mark questions - You must use both the sources and your **knowledge** to answer the question. Try to fix in your mind the judgement or interpretation that you are assessing the validity or truthfulness of by:

- **Reading the sources carefully**
- **Reading the question carefully**
- **Making your answer well structured with an**
 - opening paragraph
 - supporting the judgement or evaluation
 - arguing against the judgement
 - making your conclusion well balanced about how valid the judgement in the question is
- **Make your first and last lines focus firmly on the question.**